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ABSTRACT

Peace, though pursued, is often presented in the literature as an elusive and somewhat ethereal state that seldom is attained. However, African American communities in this country have historically developed and maintained effective, collaborative, working alliances that have assisted in individual and group survival under the most adverse circumstances. In spite of the existence of extensive within-group diversity contained in close proximity due to segregation (e.g., physical characteristics, racial/ethnic identity, level of education, value orientations, locus of control, degree of acceptance by the mainstream population, etc.), Blacks in this country have maintained states of interdependence and collaboration in the face of external and internal adversity over time. Through adherence to specific principles, functional African American communities have been able to do that which seems to elude mainstream America in its attempts to "attend to diversity" peacefully. The primary purpose of this paper is to present and discuss some underlying principles guiding the culture of these communities. It is these principles that maintain group cohesiveness in spite of stressors related to inter-group and intra-group dynamics. (Contains 43 references.) (Author/SLD)

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RUNNING HEAD: PEACE PSYCHOLOGY

The ties that bind:
Effective African American communities as models of peaceful coexistence

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Abstract

Peace, though pursued, is often presented in the literature as an elusive and somewhat ethereal state that seldom is attained. However, African American communities in this country have historically developed and maintained effective, collaborative, working alliances which have assisted in individual and group survival under the most adverse circumstances. In spite of the existence of extensive within-group diversity being contained in close proximity due to segregation (e.g., physical characteristics, racial/ethnic identity, level of education, value orientations, locus of control, degree of acceptance by mainstream population, etc.), Blacks in this country have maintained over time states of interdependence and collaboration in the face of external and internal adversity. Through adherence to specific principles, functional African American communities have been able to do that which seems to elude mainstream America in it's attempts to peacefully 'attend to diversity'.

The primary purpose of this paper is to present and discuss some underlying principles guiding the culture of these communities. It is these principles that maintain group cohesiveness in spite of stressors related to inter-group and intra-group dynamics.

Introduction

Although the cross-cultural counseling literature does specifically address within-group diversity existing among African Americans in this country, seldom do we as professionals attend to the interpersonal dynamics within communities and other life situations wherein Blacks have traditionally fostered interdependence, cooperation, acceptance, and accommodation of diversity among themselves (Bass, Acosta, & Evans, 1982; Boyd, 1982; Jones & Gray, 1983; Sue & Sue, 1990). As professionals we have attempted to resolve critical issues related to the increasing diversity within this society wide population without first examining those communities and life situations wherein minorities have maintained intimate, supportive relationships in spite of stark differences. In our search for peace, society has ignored those who are expert and have been expert in this arena long before 'attending to diversity' and 'being culturally sensitive' were the politically correct goals to attain.

The primary objectives of this paper are to present: 1) an overview of some critical factors which do contribute to within group diversity among African Americans; and, 2) a discussion of the means through which the development of peace has been facilitated and maintained within some Black communities.

Critical Factors Contributing to Conflict related to within group diversity among African Americans

External Factors

There can be no discussion of the experience of being an African American without briefly mentioning the impact of two very distinct predominant trends in the socio-political climate of this country. First, there is the perspective that Blacks, having racial minority status, are perceived by many as synonymous with 'having special needs'. In this school of thought, Blacks are seen as humans in need of levels of assistance and accommodation which are beyond that which majority group members must have to survive. Though many positive outcomes have resulted from the efforts of proponents of this view, there is one critical negative outcome that is seldom addressed. Quite often those who lead fully functioning healthy lifestyles within African American communities, as well as those who do well socio-economically in mainstream America (i.e. academically, professionally, etc.) in spite of the negative racial climate that continues to exist within this country, are often overlooked. Only the needs of those who do least well are highlighted and attended to. Consequently, the term "minority" in association with being Black becomes associated with the words 'problem' and 'deficit' which are not terms of endearment in a mainstream society that purports to value individualism and competition.

The second school of thought supports the belief that racial minority status of Blacks and others is synonymous with 'no needs' at all. These individuals tend to believe that racism and discrimination no longer exist. As above, distinctions are made among Blacks. Those individuals who excel beyond levels of most within this country are identified as models of what all minorities should be and can become if they would only pull themselves up from the abyss. The needs of those African Americans who do least well are highlighted, but not attended to. The successes and challenges of those who are contributing, fully functioning members of society in everyday life are ignored. The challenges of those minority members who are held up as models and 'credits to their race' are also ignored for they are, as all minorities 'should' be, without needs.

Though the above perspectives do differ philosophically, there are some similarities. First, both are inclined to attend to Blacks as if they were objects to be manipulated by mainstream American Whites. Second, both perspectives contribute to the perception of 'Black' as a term having distinct, negative connotations within a cultural context that does not value dependence or neediness in any form, especially from those who hold minority status. Third, both ignore the successes and common challenges experienced by the majority of fully functioning, physically healthy, emotionally stable individuals who constitute most of the African American population. Fourth, both highlight socio-economic success and upward mobility as

two of the most legitimate goals that all should strive to attain when doing so might not be valued nor attainable by all. Fifth, both result in a dynamic that counters 'acceptable' group members against those who are not 'acceptable' or validated by the members of predominant culture. Sixth, both heighten African Americans' struggle between adhering strongly to the 'home ties' and perspective cultural roots versus assimilation into mainstream culture.

In summary, both perspectives facilitate the development of a climate that fosters and reinforces internal strife among Blacks as well as maintain the historical rift that exists between Whites and African Americans in this country.

Internal Factors

This section will present those issues related to within group diversity that African Americans experience.

Racial Identity. The development of minority identity development models began with the work of Black social scientists in their efforts to discount the prevailing view that Blacks were a monolithic group (Cross, 1971; Jackson, 1975; Thomas, 1971). Though the initial model (Cross, 1971) focused solely on the development of Black Americans moving from a White frame of reference to a positive Black frame of reference, over the years due to the identification of some shared experiences across minorities groups (Berry, 1965; Stonequist, 1977), much work has been done to expand these models to include other racial/ethnic minority group members. As a result of these

efforts (Atkinson, 1983), Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1989) have proposed a Minority Identity Development Model (MID) which defines six stages of development that politically under-represented racial/ethnic people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their own culture, the dominant culture, and the relationship between the two cultures: conformity, dissonance, resistance, and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness.

World Views. A world view is how an individual perceives his/her relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people, etc.) (D.W. Sue, 1977, 1978). For those members having racial/ethnic minority status, a strong determinant of how they perceive the world is related to the extent to which they are assigned a subordinate position in the general society (Sue & Sue, 1990) as well as how they choose to respond to this assignation. Although there are several widely accepted constructs purporting to assist in the conceptualization of world view (i.e. Value-Orientation Model, Belief in a Just World, etc.), Sue's (1985) Cultural Identity Quadrants presents a model that was developed in order to assist in understanding individual's perceptions of how they uniquely fit as a minority member in terms of two dimensions: locus of control and locus of responsibility within the majority culture.

The concept of "locus of control" was first formulated by J. Rotter (1966) to assist social scientists in understanding the underlying traits that influence individuals' behaviors

as they interact in the world. "Internal control" refers to people's beliefs that reinforcements are contingent on their own action and that people can shape their own fate. "External control" refers to people's beliefs that reinforcing events occur independently of their action and that the future is determined more by chance and luck (Sue and Sue, 1990).

The concept of "locus of responsibility" was first formulated from attribution theory (Jones, 1972) as a measure of the degree of responsibility or blame placed on the individual or system. Those adhering to an "internal responsibility" orientation tend to: (a) emphasize the understanding of individual motivations, values, feelings, and goals; (b) believe that success or failure is attributable to the individuals' skills or personal inadequacies; and, (c) believe that there is a strong relationship among ability, effort, and success in society. Those adhering to an "external responsibility" orientation view the socio-cultural environment as more potent than the individual. Social, economic, and political forces are perceived as most powerful; success or failure is generally dependent on the socioeconomic system and not necessarily on personal attributes.

Physical Characteristics. Those members of society who are typically identified as African American have a wide range of physical characteristics, speech patterns, mannerisms, and interpersonal styles. Although this group, as a collective, is often spoken of as Blacks, they represent a wide range of

hues, in addition to differences in stature, hair texture, hair length, shape of nose, shape of lips, color of eyes, etc. Within the context of traditional cultural norms and within that of the majority culture, the experiences of any given individual could differ significantly as a result of physical features and interpersonal styles (Banks, 1976, Hill, 1993). Although this is true for majority members to some degree, only in an extreme case of 'difference' in physical appearance or interpersonal style is the status of within group membership questioned and the potential of a negative valence attached. For example, some African American individuals have reported observations that indicate status differences based upon skin color and hair texture in both minority and majority settings. A physical feature, such as skin color alone, has been found to influence how one is treated by other minorities, how majority group members respond to Black individuals, as well as how Blacks feel about themselves.

In addition to the complexity existing within the distinct variations mentioned above, African Americans also struggle with the same points of within group diversity as majority group members (i.e. social class, religion, value orientation, sexual preference, etc.). Though the literature above does address the impact of these unique characteristics upon the counseling process, little in the literature actually addresses the impact of these differences upon relationships among Blacks.

How African Americans have historically accommodated these

differences within their communities is seldom discussed. For in spite of pressures within and without fostering conflict and dissonance, Blacks, without legislation or political intervention, have maintained intimate, supportive, interpersonal, working alliances among themselves in both predominantly majority and predominantly minority settings. A closer examination of these dynamics could serve as a key to understanding what we as members of the world community might consider in our search for peace.

The African American community

While the media and some social scientists consistently highlight the social ills that do exist in and are destroying too many of the Black communities across the country, group members in many more communities maintain the tradition of continuing to work collaboratively to provide material, educational, spiritual, and emotional support for community members (Bell, Bland, Houston, & Jones, 1983; Hines & Boyd-Franklyn, 1982; Lewis & Looney, 1983; Martin, & Martin, 1978; Slaughter, 1976). Young adult community members who have left home are returning to the comfort and safety of these communities that contributed positively to their personal identity and which they would like to do the same for their children (Davis, 1968). Older adults who have reached retirement age are returning to these communities to not only contribute to the service found within, but also to experience the comfort and respect that is offered to the elders (Baker, 1982; Seiden,

1981; Slaughter, 1976). Positive adjustments have been made even though community diversity is often heightened. Returning community members, more often than not, have experienced and been influenced by long periods of time being educated, living, and/or working in predominantly majority settings. These influences are being accommodated within the original community as well. Many Black communities have historically been able to accomplish and are still accomplishing that with which mainstream America continues to struggle, the search for peace (Hill, 1971; Hines & Boyd-Franklyn, 1982; Johnson, 1982; Miller, 1973; Slaughter, 1976; Stack, 1974). The following section addresses some general principles inherent in these settings that contribute directly to this long standing success story.

Transcultural Caring: Sensitively responding to diversity

Though 'transcultural caring' is a concept related to both health and mental health professions (Leininger, 1978, 1981), this author believes that the term best reflects the principles that have been exhibited in many past and present functional African American communities. A modified definition of transcultural caring is the deliberate and creative use of self- and other-knowledge and skills to assist others and self in attaining well-being and survival in diverse and changing contexts. It implies self knowledge and acceptance; the willingness to accept feedback; and, a persisting expressed value of others whose difference is not detrimental to the process of peace. The following are some of the peace-fostering

principles that have been observed in these communities.

Principle #1: Redefining peace to accommodate the experience of struggle and conflict. In the English language peace is defined by Webster as: a condition that exists when groups or individuals are not fighting or struggling for power; a state of calm. This 'state' definition appears to foster the notion that peace is temporary, idyllic, apt to disappear at any moment. Peace in this definition is typically perceived as the aftermath of battle or war. A state that is attained only after one party has been subjugated, assimilated, or alienated and another has been declared the victor.

In contrast, peace as a process implies that it can be a continual state that accepts the normal occurrence of disagreements and struggles (internal and external) as critical means to understanding self and others and clarifying points of diversity. Doing so, normalizes the concept of 'peace' and daily disagreements and conflicts become perceived as learning experiences to be valued. Peace would then be defined as the process of engaging in activity that fosters the maintenance of working relationships (collectivism) that benefit involved parties by heightening self- and other-awareness and engaging respectfully in the movement toward common goals (Bass et al., 1982; Boyd, 1982; Dillard, 1983; Jackson, 1983; Nobels, 1976).

Principle #2: Fostering passive competition to the same degree as active competition (Dillard, 1983). Opportunities

for active competition in the form of sports, pageants, talent contests, etc. are often very prevalent in these communities. Opportunities are available for the 'best' in many areas to be identified, acknowledged, and validated as bringing outside recognition and value to the group. However, there are also many opportunities for passive competition wherein everyone participates and does his/her best, receiving validation for participation and contribution. Individuals' best is perceived as good enough and differences in performance level and quality of contribution are expected and accepted without public judgment (i.e., community dinners, bake sales, fashion shows, religious affiliated holiday speeches, etc.). Individual differences and strengths and weaknesses are accepted as normal. Both passive and active competition activities are also perceived as being essential in the process of maintaining a sense of fellowship and personal validation.

Principle #3: Maintaining the 'we're all in the same boat' attitude or "collective mentality." African Americans were and are often segregated in specific areas of rural and urban settings. Members of functioning communities tend to work together to acknowledge unique differences, yet maintain a primary focus on similarities that tie one to another. Validation and acceptance of points of distinction are acknowledged, but are not essential to maintaining peace. An individual can disagree, not understand, and not accept or value another's unique behavior set or characteristic, and continue

to behave respectfully and maintain effective working alliances and supportive relationships. This attitude appears to subject members to the exposure to others' reactions and opinions, however, the expression of the reaction is typically short-lived and replaced by a focus on more important life issues of survival. (Bass et al., 1982; Boyd, 1982; Dillard, 1983; Hill, 1972; Jackson, 1983; Grevious, 1985).

This attitude is also reflected in the tendency toward forgiveness (the act of excusing a personal violation; to pardon). Conflicts do arise and feelings are sometimes bruised by the direct sharing of feedback (Sue & Sue, 1990). Members at times also experience the disappointment and anger resulting from unmet expectations. However, community members tend to not only ask for forgiveness, but to extend it as well. Members appear to be committed to maintaining the process of peacefulness and interaction instead of allowing temporary states of 'conflict' and physical and/or emotional separation to prevail. When necessary, uninvolved parties also support this healing process by encouraging contact and reaffiliation. Although 'who was right and who was wrong' is one aspect to be addressed, the priority is that individuals reconnect with a renewed understanding of themselves and others (Dillard, 1983). (The author believes that the process of peace is diminished by members' attempting to force others to fit into an image of how they 'ought' to be. Peace is reduced to a state where there is an emphasis on 'who is right and who is wrong' and reuniting

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is secondary.)

Principle #4: The assumption of an "individual responsibility" cognitive set once aware of a personal struggle, challenge, or need of another. This appears to serve as a useful means of immediate intervention or attention to community members. Visitation, food, board, words of comfort, advice and guidance, and money, are commonly shared when a need is recognized (Dillard, 1983; Grevious, 1985; Hill, 1972; Jackson, 1983). Most individuals assume the responsibility to give what they can, and all that is given is acceptable and appreciated. For most members there tends to be a focus on 'what is' and what can and/or will I do about it, and not what ought to be done for another. A sense of personal responsibility extends beyond the nuclear family and biological ties. Family is community and community is family (Bass et al., 1982; Boyd, 1982; Jackson, 1983; Nobles, 1976; Richardson, 1966).

Principle #5: The identification of well-defined behaviors that are considered to be esteemed vs. taboo within the context of the community. Social status and class position are not associated with economic status, but the adherence to behavior sets that have been identified as 'respectable' (Dillard, 1983; Grevious, 1985; Hill, 1972). Therefore, someone who may be considered 'poor' according to external standards (i.e. annual income, level of education), may, in fact, have high social standing within the community due to the avoidance of taboo behaviors and consistent adherence to 'respectable' behaviors.

On the other hand, someone who may have a higher income, may have the lowest social status due to consistent adherence to taboo behaviors.

Because social status is behavior-based and the rules for attainment are a critical part of the training and socialization of all children, it is also perceived as being the result of choice. Each individual community member is perceived as choosing class position. Some examples of 'respectable' behaviors or characteristics are: expressed respect for all elders; consistent giving and sharing of materials within and without biological family boundaries; cleanliness and neat appearance; honesty; positive participation in community activities; consistent giving and sharing of guidance and counsel toward the development of respectability and well-being of others (particularly youths); law-abiding; having a skill, avocation, or vocation; being spiritual; etc. Examples of taboo behaviors are: inattention to offspring; engaging in illegal activities; poor personal hygiene; public use of profanity; sexual promiscuity; dishonesty; disrespect of parents and other elders, etc. Consequences individuals experience due to engaging in taboo behavior set(s) are: first, self-awareness that one is engaging in 'not respected' or 'not valued' behaviors; second, being reminded of the noncompliance by other community members; third, being exposed to others' reactions to the noncompliance; fourth, if 'not respected' behavior set(s) harm or violate others, internal and/or external community resources are used

to intervene, however, if a noncompliance does not harm or violate others, community accommodation follows. (Bass et al., 1982; Goodwin, 1971; Johnson, 1982; Norton, 1983; Powell, 1983).

Principle #6: Maintaining community ties with those beyond the physical boundaries of the community (Bass et al., 1982; Boyd, 1982; Dillard, 1983; Grevious, 1985; Nobles, 1976; Sue & Sue, 1990). Community members continue to serve as information resources regarding community events and needs as well as sources of support and encouragement to those who are physically separated. Members periodically plan community reunions in order to facilitate the maintenance of ties to those who no longer live in the immediate area. The community ties can bind members for a lifetime.

These principles represent some very broad generalizations about functional Black communities. Not all African American communities today adhere to all of the above principles. Some of the more dysfunctional neighborhoods adhere to very few of these principles or at least adherence is only by the least visible. It is also important to note that there are other racial/ethnic minority communities and some ethnic groups represented within the majority population which have used some of the above principles as means to survive and thrive in America. However, the author believes that African Americans have continued to do that which eludes world powers in spite of negative national and international media, political under-representation, in addition to overt and covert racial

discrimination in all critical arenas of living (i.e., education, employment, income, justice system, housing, etc.) unique to members of this population (Dillard, 1983; Grosgebauer, 1987; Lockard, 1987; Wolinsky, 1982; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980). The previous section serves as an overview of the principles that appear to strengthen the sense of belongingness and fellowship that are common where there is unexpected 'peace'.

In general, the above principles reflect the three primary components of the transcultural caring model: the preservation of others; the accommodation of others; and, the comfortable open exchange of ideas, opinions and attitudes as an avenue toward increasing self and other awareness. All facilitate peaceful coexistence. Individuals participating in the maintenance of peace in such 'communities' can have the following experiences:

1. Feel as if they are inherently valuable;
2. Believe that their presence is important to others;
3. Believe that they are not alone in spite of being different;
4. Are aware of others' perceptions of them;
5. Are comfortable with the role of conflict and disagreement in the process of learning;
6. Are more aware of self in relation to others in the world around them;
7. Are empowered by a sense of being a valued contributor in the process of maintaining a peaceful co-existence

with others;

8. Can be a victor without subjugating or alienating others;
9. Have a sense of responsibility and achievement related to the pursuit of common goals that are mutually beneficial to all parties by affiliation alone, and not by what they individually produce; and,
10. Have status and respect within the community regardless of wealth, status, or engagement in upwardly mobile activity.

In summary, peace can be experienced to the same degree that each of us will commit to altering negative attitudes: that limit our caring for self and others; that influence the effectiveness of our work with whom we relate; and, that affect the communities within which we work and within which we choose to live. Given that we do have a history of populations in the country who have created a lifestyle of peaceful coexistence in spite of internal and external challenges, it would seem imperative that we model and reinforce such behaviors to accommodate our changing world. We cannot continue to perceive peace as an elusive goal, but, instead, as the outcome of deliberate and strategic effort toward personal and social change. Which will we choose?

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